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February 2022

Testimony of Heather-Renaé Paul
Agency Development Director, Reliance Health, Inc.

RE: H.B. No. 5037- AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNium
ENDING JUNE 30, 2023.

Dear Chairwoman Osten, Chairwoman Walker, and Distinguished Members of the
Appropriations Committee,

My name is Heather-Renaé Paul, and I am the Agency Development Director for Reliance Health, a nonprofit mental health agency in Downtown Norwich, which serves over 1000 individuals at any given time. I have worked at Reliance Health for the past twelve years and during this time I have not only fallen in love with the important work we do, but I have seen firsthand the major effect our small non-profit budgets have on our services and clients.

Therefore, I strongly support H.B. No 5037.

My testimony is going to come from the perspective of unfunded mandates and the unrealistic expectations the state of Connecticut asks of agencies such as ours with no financial support or increases in return.

Recently, Reliance Health, along with many other non-profits in the state, have been asked to focus more on client face-to-face services, specifically in one area called Targeted Case Management. These services are submitted through our Electronic Health Record and generate money from the federal government through Medicaid for Connecticut. These services are crucial for our clients to receive solid resources and connect to providers, but we, the nonprofits, are personally generating revenue that we do not directly receive back. Instead, the money goes to the Connecticut general fund.

Let's look at it this way: you are a waitress who received \$100.00 in tips for the work you did but instead of you going home with that \$100.00, your boss keeps the money. How is that fair? Not being appropriately compensated for one's tangible work is offensive and unethical.

I should go on to highlight that the Electronic Health Record I mentioned before comes with a hefty cost. It costs \$175,000 annually to maintain the system with required upgrades as needed. This year our upgrade will cost us \$45,000. This upkeep is something we must do to have a dynamic health record system in order to provide required information to the state of Connecticut for any funding to be received. See how this is a brutal cycle?

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Without increased funding we are forced to continually go to the drawing board to figure out how we use our limited - small - budgets to pay for our services. We should not be having to do a creativity dance to provide high quality services for people who need us.

I know you might be exhausted from hearing that the nonprofit sector is underfunded because so am but how do we express what we need in a way for change to actually happen? I know there will always be competing priorities to consider, but I cannot accept that certain priorities are continually compensated before the nonprofit sector is.

For ten years the nonprofit sector was flat-funded with a 5% budget cut in 2017 and most recently a 4% increase in 2021. This does not make us whole. This translates to the state giving little to no emphasis on a person's life and the services that help them to become the best version of themselves.

Ask yourself...What if community nonprofits were not here?

Thank you for your time today and for allowing me my right to testify for budgetary adjustments to be made for health agencies.

Your Neighbor,

Heather-Renaé Paul